



**Testimony of Leo Paul**  
**On behalf of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns**  
**Presented to the Appropriations Committee**  
**of the Connecticut General Assembly**  
**March 2, 2010**

Good morning Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to share some thoughts with you today.

My name is Leo Paul. I am First Selectman in the Town of Litchfield and I am also a member of the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns. My remarks represent COST's positions on numerous planks of its legislative platform for this session of the General Assembly.

Traditionally, this Forum focuses on the issue of state aid to towns for the upcoming fiscal year. And earlier speakers have made effective presentations in this regard. I'd like to change direction a little and include state mandate relief in our discussions today.

Considering the distress both the state and its municipalities are facing as a result of the economy, mandate relief is certainly a timely topic. In fact, it may be one of the most effective tools at your disposal to mitigate the impact of the state deficit on towns.

Before I speak to the idea of cost-containment through mandate relief, I'd like to talk briefly about two funding issues of great concern to small communities: regional planning agencies and resident state troopers. Our towns value their regional planning organizations. I am an active member of the Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials – or LHCEO – and currently serve as its Chair.

LHCEO is very concerned with a recommendation in the Governor's FY2010-2011 mid-term budget adjustment proposal that would effectively eliminate funding for regional planning agencies. Specifically, on page C-3 of the proposal, the line item for regional planning agencies has been recommended to be reduced from the \$200,000 appropriated amount to \$100.

There is a significant disconnect between such a proposal and the Governor's expressed support for increased regional cooperation. For example, her mid-term budget adjustment also calls for a new \$10 million Municipal Capital Equipment Purchase Grant Program to encourage the joint acquisition by municipalities of equipment necessary for government service. LHCEO currently operates a regional public works equipment cooperative and we believe that regional planning organizations are the logical entities to coordinate such programs. We respectfully recommend that this Committee – if it adopts the Governor's Municipal Capital Equipment Purchase Grant Program - use \$1 million of the \$10 million to restore funding to Connecticut's regional planning organizations at a reasonable level.

The draconian cuts in grants to regional planning organizations that have been made during the past few years undermine the Governor's and the Legislature's stated commitment to the promotion of regional cooperation in Connecticut. It also presents an added burden to our municipal budgeting process, since the abandonment of state support means our member towns will need to increase local funding support to maintain the regional planning organization services. We urge this Committee to restore funding to Connecticut's RPOs.

With respect to the Resident State Trooper program, we urge this Committee to resist any effort to reduce funding for this essential public safety program. Last year the Governor's proposed budget proposed shifting a much greater portion of the financial responsibility of resident state trooper costs to the town that employs them. Under current law, the state pays 30% of the cost of a resident trooper. Under her proposal, towns would be required to pay 85% of the costs the first fiscal year and all of it the second. Had the General Assembly not taken decisive action during the special session last summer, her proposal would have forced many of our small towns to eliminate the resident state trooper, putting the public's safety at risk. These towns simply cannot afford a police department of their own and, with further cuts, would be unable to afford a resident state trooper.

Now, back to the issue of unfunded mandates. This issue has been a focus of the Speaker's Blue Ribbon Commission on Municipal Opportunities and Regional Efficiencies (M.O.R.E.) – specifically the M.O.R.E. subcommittee on which I represent COST.

If and when bills addressing the following issues come before you in your capacity as members of the Committee or as members of other committees, we urge your favorable consideration. We know that some may be opposed by other interest groups, but would ask if now – during this extraordinarily difficult economic period - is not the time to enact such measures, when will it be time? COST urges the Legislature to:

- Increase the prevailing wage threshold on municipal public works projects to one million dollars for both renovation and new construction and index the threshold to the annual inflation rate;
- Reform the existing binding arbitration laws by modifying the Municipal Employee Relations Act and the Teacher Negotiation Act to give towns the right to reject arbitration awards by a 2/3 vote of a town's legislative body;

- Allow towns to post on the Internet meeting notices instead of the current requirement to be published in newspapers;
- Repeal the in-school suspension mandate which requires towns to make additional space and staff available to monitor students in in-school suspension;
- Repeal the mandate on towns to remove and store the personal property left by evicted tenants;
- Reform the FOI mandate requiring minutes and agendas to be posted on a town's website within strict statutory timeframes;
- Enact a statutory prohibition on any new or expanded unfunded state mandates; and,
- Reject proposed stream flow regulations that will increase water rates, impose significant Infrastructure costs on towns served by municipal water departments and limit opportunities for economic development in numerous towns;

Finally, COST continues to advocate enactment of a statutory prohibition against any unfunded mandates without a two-thirds majority vote of the Legislature. Local property taxpayers simply cannot bear any more state imposed expenses on their communities!

Again, thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to try to answer any questions.